

LIFE OF JOHN KITTO

LIFE

OF

JOHN KITTO D.D.

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CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND BOYHOOD.

JOHN KITTO, the eldest son of John Kitto and Elizabeth Picken, was born at Plymouth on the 4th of December 1804. So small and sickly was the infant that only a few hours of life were expected for him. Though nursed with uncommon tenderness and assiduity, it was long before the child was able to walk. This original feebleness was never surmounted. His stature was considerably below the average height, and his limbs were defective in vigour; while a headache, recurring at longer or shorter intervals, accompanied him from his cradle to his grave. As this constitutional frailty unfitted him, to a large extent, for the society of other boys, and debarred him from their sports, it must have prevented, or at least greatly retarded, a healthful physical development. Bodily exercise was his grand necessity all his days, but he never relished it, and, indeed, never took it, till he had partially paid the penalty of neglect. Distaste for it may have originated in his incapacity to run and riot with his childish comrades; but it clung to him, and grew upon him as he advanced in years—nay, led him, when charged by his physician to walk so many miles a day, and when his life depended on punctual compliance, to seek, by various shifts and pleasantries, to lessen the amount of his pedestrian regimen.

If a boy that has not sufficient strength and hardihood to keep pace with his fellows in their boisterous pastimes, should be often seen with his book behind a hedge, or on a sunny slope, or found quietly seated in his own corner of the domestic hearth, it would naturally be concluded that he had been well educated; that since he reads so much, volumes are freely at his disposal; that he meets with parental encouragement; that no misery preys upon his heart; and

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that there is no undue demand for labour upon his youthful sinews. But Kitto's condition was exactly the reverse. He was not sent to school till he was eight years of age; the majority of his books were begged or borrowed, by continuous and untiring effort; his home was a scene of misery and degradation; and, by the time he was twelve years old, the dwarfed skeleton was yoked to the heavy drudgery of a mason's labourer.

It is scarcely possible to estimate the amount of evil influences that were thrown around Kitto from his childhood. His parents, both in humble life, had married young—the bridegroom, a mason by trade, and doing business on his own account, being in his twentieth year, and the bride in her eighteenth. But alas! the gay 'morning, with gold the hills adorning,' was speedily overcast, and there closed in a dark and stormy afternoon. The young husband and father soon fell into intemperance, and his heart and home became a wreck. Character was not only lost, but the love of a good reputation died away within him. He was, as his son has said, of 'the class of men whom prosperity ruins;' and from being a master, he sank into a servant. The curse of poverty fell upon his family, for what he earned he consumed upon his lusts. Swiftly pursuing his reckless and downward career, he found himself more than once in 'durance vile,' and at length, and at a later period, a more serious misdemeanour threatened such consequences, that his poor boy writes, in the bitterness of his soul—'What will they now say of Kitto, the felon's son?'<sup>1</sup> To snatch the delicate child out of this wretchedness, he was transferred, in his fourth year, to his grandmother's poor garret. She, 'dear old woman,' nursed him with more than a mother's tenderness, and her he regarded with inexpressible affection. She, too, had been blighted by intemperance. Her second husband, John Picken, though usually reckoned a sober man, had gone from Plymouth to Bigbury, a distance of thirteen miles, and spent the evening to a late hour with friends in the alehouse; so that, as he was riding home somewhat intoxicated, his horse trotted into a pond, and its rider falling from its back, was drowned in his helplessness. Kitto's mother was born a month after the melancholy event. 'Alas!' says her son, on a comparison of his grandmother's and mother's fate—'My mother has the sad pre-eminence in misery.' For the shadow which had fallen upon her birth gathered over her wedded life in more terrible gloom. Intemperance had made her a posthumous child, and now it made her an unhappy wife, and a broken-hearted mother. Menial offices of the lowest form, she was at length glad to do, working, as she once tells her boy, 'from five in the morning to ten in the evening,' that she might have something to put into the mouth of her babes.

From his fourth to his eighth year, though Kitto enjoyed a partial asylum with his grandmother, who 'pinched herself to support' him, yet he got no

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schooling. True, he enjoyed another kind of education, perhaps as essential to his welfare. He strolled through the fields and lanes with his venerated relative, and gathered the flowers and plucked the fruits, which grew around him in wild luxuriance, his grandmother deftly using her staff to hook down the clusters of nuts and berries which were beyond his reach. At other times they turned their course to the sea-beach, and both were nerved by the breezes, which carried the surf to the feet of the aged pilgrim and her tiny charge. As they returned from these frequent and happy excursions, she usually supplied him liberally 'with ginger-bread, plums, apples, or sugar-stick,' her indifference to the sweetness of the last article often filling his young imagination with great amazement.<sup>2</sup>

At the age of eight Kitto was sent to school, and he remained, for various periods, and at various places of tuition, during the next three years. The congenital malady of headache was perpetually attacking him, and destroying the punctuality of his attendance. But there was another reason for his irregularity. His grandmother was too poor to pay the requisite fees, and his father either would not, or could not, spare a few pence for the purpose; so that when the fees could be saved from the ale-cup, the boy attended school, and when not, he stayed at home.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps this circumstance may account for the changes made in the schools he was sent to; for he was 'placed, for short and interrupted periods, at the schools of Messrs Winston, Stephens, Treeby, and Goss.'<sup>4</sup> Probably, at first, he lost as much in these forced recesses as he had gained in the previous weeks of attendance. Still there must have been great carelessness on the part of his parents, 'for they might have availed themselves of the opportunities which the many charity schools of the town afforded, for the instruction of poor boys in elementary knowledge.'<sup>5</sup> But such neglect was inevitable—the father still drank, and the mother was obliged to go out and char. Kitto did not gain a great deal by this desultory schooling; his early attainments not extending further 'than reading, writing, and the imperfect use of figures.' The first specimens of writing which we have, about four years after this date, are legible, but by no means very elegant; and as the occasional blunders in spelling and syntax in the same papers indicate, his English acquired at school was not to be measured by a very high standard. His 'granny' once boasted that he was the best scholar in Plymouth; but he blushed at the unmerited honour, and rejected it, adding, however, as her apology, 'she did it ignorantly, but affectionately.'

But his real, as distinct from his formal, education began under his grandmother's roof. The little fellow, seated quietly at her knee, was, for his amusement and occupation, taught by her to sew; and such was his assiduity, that he exulted in having done the greater portion of a 'gay patchwork' for her bed, besides having finished 'quilts and kettle-holders enough for two generations.'

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His fingers might, indeed, soon fall out of practice with needle and scissors, but he was unconsciously training to that retired and patient industry which characterized his subsequent life of seclusion and silence. Then, too, from his grandmother's lips, he came first to know the current lore of ghosts, hobgoblins, fairies, and witches; and a lively shoe-maker, named Roberts, who dwelt in the same tenement, added his contribution of nursery literature, and repeated, with awl and cord in hand, the tales of Bluebeard and Cinderella, Jack the Giant-killer, and Beauty and the Beast. 'Assuredly,' says Kitto, in 1832, 'never have I since felt so much respect and admiration of any man's talents and extent of information as those of poor Roberts.' The young listener was charmed. By and by, he found out that such wondrous stories were not mere traditions, to be heard only from the lips of his grandmother and the cordwainer, but that they might be actually seen in print, in Mrs Barnicle's shop-window, ay, and he had for a copper trifle. 'This information,' he says, 'first inclined me to reading.' He was at once induced to buy them, as often as he could afford the small expense. The passion grew upon him, and every spare penny went for the purpose. He willingly denied himself the dainties which his dotting grandam would have provided for him—no confections so bewitching as a picture-book, and no fruit so sweet as a nursery-rhyme. His desire of reading was indicated by his growing love of quietness, and by his decreasing relish for amusements out of doors, while it was nursed by the zealous watchings of his relative, who, when he was permitted to go out for a brief period to play, soon interrupted him by her loud call from the garret window, of 'Johnny, Johnny!'—a sound, he pathetically adds, more than twenty years afterwards, 'which, notwithstanding my deafness, rings in my ears at this moment.' It was surely a kind Providence which was so disciplining him, that the work of his subsequent life did not necessitate a sudden and violent change of habit. He was thus, at a very early period, thrown much upon himself and upon books for his amusement, a proof, as he was wont to argue, that his love of literature was certainly not created, though it was ripened and confirmed, by his subsequent deafness. The books in his grandmother's possession were speedily explored—'a Family Bible, with plenty of engravings; a Prayer-book; Bunyan's Pilgrim; and Gulliver's Travels.' 'The two last I soon devoured,' says he, 'and so much did I admire them, that, to increase their attractions, I decorated all the engravings with the indigo my grandmother used in washing, using a feather for a brush. Some one at last gave me a four-penny box of colours, and between that and my books, I was so much interested at home, that I retained little inclination for play; and when my grandmother observed this, she did all in her power to encourage those studious habits, by borrowing for me books of her neighbours.' All the books in the street passed

speedily through his hands. Prior to his twelfth year, he had got into a new world, and he was at first bewildered by its variety. Nothing would satisfy him but book upon book. The voracious student was not at all backward in maintaining a supply by pen or tongue. His first efforts at composition were written to the kind and obliging mistress of a neighbouring charity school, and were either requests for the loan of a volume, or apologies for putting the lender to so much trouble. ‘Many of the old neighbours,’ he says, ‘will remember what a plague I was to them in this respect.’ In fact, if he heard of a book being within reach, he pestered everybody about him till he got it. What he calls his ‘first literary effort,’ was at this time also achieved by him, and he has thought it of such importance, as to place it on record himself. Nay, when looked at in the light of his subsequent career, it might be regarded as a propitious omen. The following is his amusing account of the transaction:

‘My cousin came one day with a penny in his hand, declaring his intention to buy a book with it. I was just then sadly in want of a penny to make up fourpence, with which to purchase the history of King Peppin (not Pepin), so I inquired whether he bought a book for the pictures or the story? “The story, to be sure.” I then said, that in that case, I would, for his penny, write him both a larger and a better story than he could get in print for the same sum, and that he might be still further a gainer, I would paint him a picture at the beginning, and he knew there were no painted pictures in penny books. He expressed the satisfaction he should feel in my doing so, and sat down quietly on the stool to note my operations. When I had done, I certainly thought my cousin’s penny pretty well earned; and as, at reading the paper and viewing the picture, he was of the same opinion, no one else had any right to complain of the bargain. I believe this was the first penny I ever earned. I happened to recollect this circumstance when last at Plymouth, and felt a wish to peruse this paper, if still in existence; but my poor cousin, though he remembered the circumstance, had quite forgotten both the paper and its contents, unless that it was “something about what was done in England at the time when wild men lived in it”—even this was further than my own recollection extended.’

As the boy occasionally sauntered through the streets, and had so much time on his hand, he read all the play-bills posted on the walls; and though he had never read or seen a play, he resolved to get up one—the ‘price of admission being, ladies eight pins, gentlemen ten.’ Dresses were prepared, such as ribbons and sashes, caps and feathers, and the play was acted; the value of the pins collected amounting to three halfpence. The drama was a tragedy, so sweeping in its mimic massacre, that only one little actress remained alive at the end; and the audience, consisting of fifteen boys and girls, were perfectly satisfied with

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the performance. The whole affair was sufficiently childish, though Kitto was disposed to make his share—the play-bill and the plot—a proof of his literary progress.

It is plain, from these statements, that Kitto's early love of reading was no whim, or more childish curiosity, but that there was a craving for information awakened within him. He rose gradually, even in his boyhood, to a more select and useful class of books. The cousin referred to, and for whom the booklet was extemporized, was as fond of books as Kitto, and could far more easily procure them; but his love of reading soon passed away from him, and in his manhood he scarce turned the leaf of anything, 'save a jest-book or a song.' With him, literary relish was only a variety of juvenile caprice, and the ball and the book might, at any moment, change places in his fancy; whereas in Kitto's case, the thirst for knowledge had really been excited, and, no matter how often baffled, it was never to be repressed. He enjoyed, at the same time, some religious education, and could answer a few questions from the Church Catechism. He also attended church so often, as to have caught the manner of Dr Hawker the vicar, and be able to imitate it, to his grandmother's vexation, when he read the Bible to her. Yet no serious impression seems to have been made upon him: 'After,' says he, 'I had studied the engravings, and read so much of the text as seemed to explain these, I felt then no disposition to study the Bible further.' There was much in it to interest him, had he chosen to read it—many scenes and stories that might have fascinated him both in the Old and New Testament; but the time had not yet come when he was to find it a refuge to the weary, and a balm to the smitten in heart, and when its illustration was to form the daily business of his life.

But the sky was gradually lowering around him. His grandmother ceased, in 1814, to have any separate means of support, while age and disease were leaving their traces upon her. Reduced to poverty and attacked by paralysis, she was forced to go to live with her youngest daughter. Under his father's roof again, Kitto soon felt the saddening change. The boy must do something for his maintenance, and, in the spring of the year 1815, he was sent as a species of apprentice to a barber's shop. 'Old Wigmore,' as his facetious underling records, 'had practised on board a ship-of-war, and related adventures which rivalled Baron Munchausen;' had a face so 'sour,' that it sickened one to look at it, and 'which was beside all over red by drinking spirituous liquors.'<sup>6</sup> While in Wigmore's service, he learned only so much of his art, as to be able to shave. For want of better occupation, he seems to have practised so frequently upon himself, as, by the age of sixteen, to have induced a growth of no ordinary thickness on his upper lip, while, by the repeated application of the scissors to

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his eye-brows, they acquired also a similar premature 'bushiness.' But, from this occupation, he was summarily dismissed. His master's stock-in-trade, or at least his best razors, were put under Kitto's charge, and taken home by him every night. One morning, as he came up to the shop, with the precious implements of his calling under his arm, a woman in front of the unopened place of business, professed to be anxiously waiting for Wigmore, and that no time might be lost, she induced Kitto to leave his parcel with her, and run and call his master. As might have been anticipated, she was off before Kitto returned, and the surly old fellow discharged the little craftsman on suspicion of his being an accomplice of the thief. Kitto keenly felt the imputation, for his mere simplicity was branded as knavery. And thus ended his first and curious engagement.

What, then, was the boy to do, but occasionally put on a smock-frock, and go out and assist his father? He did so, both in town and country—the grieved witness and reporter of his parent's profligacy. When left at leisure at any time, he usually took to wandering in the fields, and among the rocks. He felt himself growing out of harmony with his home and the world around him. As his mind opened, he became more and more conscious of his unhappy lot. He confesses that he first 'knew what happiness was, by his own exclusion from it.' He pined for solitude with book in hand

'Away, away, from men and towns,  
To the wild woods and the downs;  
To the silent wilderness,  
Where the soul need not repress  
Its moaning, lest it should not find  
An echo in another's mind.'

In fact, morbid imaginations began at this time to gather upon him. Having picked up a dog's head, which had been long bleached on the sands, he at once determined to make it a sort of symbolical memento, and having given it a more ghastly appearance, by reddening its jaws, and replenishing its eyeholes and mouth with artificial orbs and tongue, he hung up the grotesque teraphim at the foot of his bed. He had long sought in vain for a human skull, that he might place it in the same position. The abode of his father was old and tall, and John's dormitory, in the very apex of it, was of small dimensions, seven feet by four. It was ventilated by an aperture that admitted the wind, and could not exclude the rain, and was furnished with a rickety table, framed originally to stand on three feet, but now sustaining itself with difficulty on two. This dark oak table was an old heirloom, and highly prized even in its decrepitude. The bed was

in keeping with the table, and was by turns a seat and a couch, according as the strange inmate of the den wished to work or sleep. A chest was there, too, having its appropriate uses, with a box of smaller dimensions, holding pebbles and shells, and the other contents of his museum, and which was fastened with a string, passing through a huge and rusty padlock—‘a satire on security.’ The walls were spattered with such prints as he could afford to buy, and such drawings as he was able to execute. Here was his library of a dozen volumes, having among them a Bible ‘imprinted by Barker in the days of Queen Elizabeth,’ and here he continued, so far as his intermittent toil allowed, his habits of miscellaneous reading. His spirit was gladdened, amidst all his oppressions and wrongs, by such literary vigils. He made indexes to his books, and even then he delighted to hang over the lines of Young and Spenser. We can easily imagine the sorrow of his grandmother, at the changed condition and shrouded prospects of her favourite. Perhaps she regarded his position in life as fixed, and suspected that, if his strength at all permitted, he would naturally follow his father’s occupation. Who, at that moment, could have gainsaid such a prediction? But Providence interposed, and suddenly changed the entire current of events.

On the 13th of February 1817, the elder Kitto was engaged in repairing the roof of a house in Batter Street, Plymouth. His slim and ragged son was, about half-past four in the afternoon, engaged in carrying up a load of slates, and, when in the act of stepping from the top of the ladder to the roof, he lost his footing and fell, a distance of thirty-five feet, into the court beneath. There he lay insensible, bleeding profusely at mouth and nose. On being lifted, about five minutes after, consciousness returned for an instant, and he could not divine why he came there, or why so many people were staring at him. For more than a week, he continued in prostrate insensibility; for four months, he was obliged to keep his bed, and he did not entirely recover his strength, till other four months had also elapsed. But the accident had deprived him wholly of the faculty of hearing. What injury was done to the organ was never ascertained, and no possible form of treatment could remove it. He was subjected to every variety of surgical torment and experiment, but all in vain. The action of the auditory nerve was completely paralysed, perhaps, as has been surmised, from the entire internal apparatus being gorged with blood. The sense was not simply dulled, it was extinguished. He became deaf, not comparatively, as if he could hear only a little, and that even with extreme pain and difficulty, but absolutely, for he could not hear at all. The base of the skull had also sustained some fracture beyond the reach of detection or reparation—a sad supplement to his constitutional headache.



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In after years, Kitto often reflected upon the accident, and he virtually assigns no less than three causes for it. His first account of it in his *Workhouse Journal* (1820), enters into no such details, and the probability is, that the reasons ultimately urged, had really little to do with the matter, but are rather the suggestions of an inquisitive and introspective mind, which tried to connect the fall with some previous mental associations, through which he might have been thrown off his guard. The phenomenon has happened too often to be one of mystery. Any one may stumble, after he has often mounted a ladder, under a heavy burden—much more a feeble boy like John Kitto who never enjoyed great power of limb or firmness of step. It does not need any analysis of his previous thoughts to account for his mistake. He had climbed repeatedly with a portion of mortar and slates during the day; and familiarity with the pathway may have induced a momentary carelessness. Or the frequent ascent may have so wearied his sinews, that when he had reached the summit of the ladder, and a different muscular action was required, he had not the complete control of them. Or his knee-joints, stiffened with the short and hard jerk of so many steps up and down, repeated for so many hours, may not have stretched so far as he imagined, when he attempted to throw his foot on the eaves. In one account, he refers to the anticipation of a wonderful book, which had been promised him by the town-crier for that evening; and in another, to the prospect of a smock-frock, on which his grandmother had been a long time working, and which he greatly needed, for he was in tatters, ‘out at elbows, out at shoulders, out at breast, out all over;’ and, lastly, he seems to impute the accident to the post mortem examination of a young sailor’s body, going on in one of the rooms of the house on which his father was employed, the effect of which he had happened to notice, as he was ascending the ladder, in the form of bloody water spouting from the gutter. Were the last the true version, there would have been a physical source of unsteadiness—vertigo or momentary faintness, which, however, he does not affirm, but speaks simply of a ‘shock;’ whereas the two former reasons adduced by him, could only have produced absence of mind. Besides, the third hypothesis would supersede the other suspected causes, which are purely mental, and which, moreover, had been just as powerful during the whole day, as at the fatal moment. All the three could not well co-exist, and the circumstance of a post mortem dissection could hardly affect so deeply the nerves of one who had long tried, in various ways, to get the skull of a human skeleton, for the guardian symbol of his couch.

On being carried home, the stunned youth lay in ‘a trance of nearly a fortnight. At length he wakened up as from a night’s sleep,’ and perceived that it was two hours later than his usual time of rising, but he could not even move in

bed. Many an hour he spent in ‘trying to piece together his broken recollections,’ so as to comprehend his position. How he learned that he had become deaf, is thus particularly related by himself. There was profound silence in the room in which the pathetic scene took place, and alas! that silence reigned around him ever afterwards.

‘I was very slow in learning that my hearing was entirely gone. The unusual stillness of all things was grateful to me in my utter exhaustion; and if, in this half-awakened state, a thought of the matter entered my mind, I ascribed it to the unusual care and success of my friends in preserving silence around me. I saw them talking, indeed, to one another, and thought that, out of regard to my feeble condition, they spoke in whispers, because I heard them not. The truth was revealed to me in consequence of my solicitude about the book which had so much interested me on the day of my fall. It had, it seems, been reclaimed by the good old man, who had lent it to me, and who doubtless concluded that I should have no more need of books in this life. He was wrong, for there has been nothing in this life which I have needed more. I asked for this book with much earnestness, and was answered by signs, which I could not comprehend. “Why do you not speak?” I cried; “Pray, let me have the book.” This seemed to create some confusion; and at length some one, more clever than the rest, hit upon the happy expedient of writing upon a slate, that the book had been reclaimed by the owner and that I could not, in my weak state, be allowed to read. ‘But,’ I said in great astonishment, “Why do you write to me? why not speak? Speak! speak!” Those who stood around the bed exchanged significant looks of concern, and the writer soon displayed upon his slate the awful words—“YOU ARE DEAF.”’<sup>7</sup>

A more complete case of isolation can hardly be imagined. Had it not been for the boy’s previous acquaintance with books, into what misery would he not have fallen? How many, with such an infirmity, without education, and in his rank of life, taunted as useless, and tormented as semi-maniacs, would have sunk into objects of pity or contempt, would have fallen into the dregs of society, and disappeared in a nameless tomb—in the pauper’s or stranger’s corner of the graveyard! Had there not been a powerful principle within him, nursed and sustained by his eagerness for reading, he might, as has been the case with not a few in his social position and with his defect, have become sullen and discontented, out of harmony with himself, and in antagonism with all around him—first a burden and then a pest. His own idea was, that ‘such trials and deprivations have been generally found to paralyse exertion, and reduce the mind to idiocy, inducing a mere oblivion of thought and feeling.’

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What circumstances, then, could be so discouraging as those of Kitto—a poor deaf boy, with none to care for him, none to guide him, or stimulate him to healthful mental exercise? Such an inmate of such a home—how helpless and how hopeless! He was able to do little for himself before, and he could certainly do less now. The father might gain a penny from his son's toils once, but now he left him wholly to his own vagaries. His grandmother's resources were exhausted too, and not a farthing to buy a book came into his possession. He resorted, therefore, to what he has graphically called, a 'Poor Student's Ways and Means.' He went down to Sutton Pool,<sup>8</sup> where the fishing trawlers' and small coasters discharged their cargoes, and, wading among its black and fetid ooze and mire at low water, he groped, along with other boys, for pieces of rope, iron, and other nautical fragments. Some of his comrades could gather as much in a day, as amounted, when sold, to threepence; but Kitto was never very nimble in his movements, and his weekly profits only swelled up once to fourpence. But he happened, on one occasion, to tread on a broken bottle, and such a wound put an immediate end to this form of industry. Then he turned to his box of paints, and bethought him of artistic employment, wondering, all the while, at the vulgarity of his previous occupation. Having laid out his capital sum of twopence on paper, he set about a series of paintings—human heads, houses, flowers, birds, and trees. Grotesque they were, according to his own account—'faces all profiles, and all looking the same way;' birds sufficiently weighty to 'bow to the dust' the branches on which they were awkwardly perched; and flowers, 'generally in pots,' with a 'centre in all cases yellow, and with any number of petals.' But in describing this handicraft, he subjoins, with a simple honesty, 'Thus far I can now smile, but no further. I cannot smile when I recollect the intense excitement with which I applied myself to my new labours, and the glorious vision of coppers and reputation which attended my progress. How knew I but, in process of time, my pictures might be pasted on the walls or over the mantel-pieces of most of the rooms in the lane where I lived! This was the extent of my ambition; for I do aver that I did never, even in thought, aspire to the dignity of being framed. The boyish ambition that might thus be acquired among my compeers, was, however, a perfectly secondary object; that which I wanted was money.' But his pictures were painted for sale, and not for criticism; and being arranged in all their glory in his mother's window, he sat down behind it, and anxiously awaited customers. Few were attracted, for few passed the court, and fewer came in to buy. Yet, the average weekly income of the artist, from this source, was about twopence-halfpenny. Then he resolved to have a 'standing' in Plymouth Fair, and wrought hard to provide his stall with an adequate supply of goods. The character of his wares

attracted many spectators, and it was probably for his comfort, that he could not hear their remarks. Their staring curiosity annoyed him, but he gained a larger sum of money by this public sale, than he had ever before possessed. Certain labels in the windows of the lanes and outskirts of the town, had long been an eyesore to him. The spelling and writing were equally wretched—‘Logins for singel men,’ ‘Rooms to leet enquir withing.’ He prepared neat and accurate substitutes, and took many a long and weary journey to dispose of his productions. Occasionally he succeeded, but as often he failed from bashfulness. The boy’s infirmity sometimes secured him sympathy, and sometimes led to a testy rebuff; and his inability to talk about his articles made his customers, in one place, kind and generous, and in another, brief and surly in their dealings with him.

The money gained from employment so precarious, was spent on books. Attachment to study might well have been chilled in a stripling who seemed to himself the most forlorn and helpless of human beings. Yet he read and pondered, frequented Mrs Bulley’s circulating library, and contrived to plod his way through numerous volumes—many, indeed, of an inferior class, but others of a higher stamp and excellence. Still he loved to stroll into the country, or recline among the shelving crags with the surge beating at his feet, and to create for himself, through his reading and reverie, a temporary Elysium. There was a stillness around him, unbroken even by his own footfall. Wearied out after a day’s solitary wandering, heart-sick at the misery and privation of his home, with bitter memories of the past, and dreary anticipations of the future, his only refuge was with his books, and in his little attic, where many a tedious hour was beguiled, and where the growing consciousness of intellectual strength could not but frequently cheer and sustain him. He used, at this time, and after being sent to the Workhouse, to go to Devonport, once almost every fortnight, to visit a bookstall in the market. He feasted among the volumes, and the keeper not only did not disturb him, but gave him books at the cheapest rate, in exchange for the few pence he had scraped together,<sup>9</sup> This man he reckoned a prince in generosity, and a perfect contrast to a ‘sour old woman,’ and a ‘surly little man,’ by whom two other stalls were kept, and who did not relish the sight of so ‘shabby a fellow’ handling their literary wares. And he naively adds, ‘I had another more logical mode of reasoning on the matter, which settled it in my mind beyond any possibility of dispute, that my friend of Devonport market, and others of his kind in general, were, and must be, the happiest men in the world. If, I used to say, they sell the books, they are happy in the money they get; but if they do not sell them, they are happy in the books they retain.’<sup>10</sup> This period has been described by Kitto himself in the following eloquent terms:

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“For many years I had no views towards literature beyond the instruction and solace of my own mind; and under these views, and in the absence of other mental stimulants, the pursuit of it eventually became a passion, which devoured all others. I take no merit for the industry and application with which I pursued this object, nor for the ingenious contrivances by which I sought to shorten the hours of needful rest, that I might have the more time for making myself acquainted with the minds of other men. The reward was great and immediate; and I was only preferring the gratification which seemed to me the highest. Nevertheless, now that I am, in fact, another being, having but slight connection, excepting in so far as “the child is father to the man,” with my former self; now that much has become a business which was then simply a joy; and now that I am gotten old in experiences, if not in years, it does somewhat move me to look back upon that poor and deaf boy, in his utter loneliness, devoting himself to objects in which none around him could sympathize, and to pursuits which none could even understand. The eagerness with which he sought books, and the devoted attention with which he read them, was simply an unaccountable fancy in their view; and the hours which he strove to gain for writing that which was destined for no other eyes than his own, was no more than an innocent folly, good for keeping him quiet and out of harm’s way, but of no possible use on earth. This want of the encouragement which sympathy and appreciation give, and which cultivated friends are so anxious to bestow on the studious application of their young people, I now count among the sorest trials of that day; and it serves me now as a measure for the intensity of my devotion to such objects, that I felt so much encouragement within, as not to need or care much for the sympathies and encouragements which are, in ordinary circumstances, held of so much importance. I undervalue them not; on the contrary, an undefinable craving was often felt for sympathy and appreciation in pursuits so dear to me; but to want this was one of the disqualifications of my condition, quite as much so as my deafness itself; and in the same degree in which I submitted to my deafness as a dispensation of Providence towards me, did I submit to this as its necessary consequence. It was, however, one of the peculiarities of my condition, that I was then, as I ever have been, too much shut up. With the same dispositions and habits, without being deaf, it would have been easy to have found companions who would have understood me, and sympathized with my love for books and study, my progress in which might also have been much advanced by such intercommunication. As it was, the shyness and reserve which the deaf usually exhibit, gave increased effect to the physical disqualification; and precluded me from seeking, and kept me from incidentally finding, beyond the narrow sphere in which I moved, the sympa-

thies which were not found in it. As time passed, my mind became filled with ideas and sentiments, and with various know-ledges of things new and old, all of which were as the things of another world to those among whom my lot was cast. The conviction of this completed my isolation; and eventually all my human interests were concentrated in these points, to get books, and, as they were mostly borrowed, to preserve the most valuable points in their contents, either by extracts, or by a distinct intention to impress them on the memory. When I went forth, I counted the hours till I might return to the only pursuits in which I could take interest; and when free to return, how swiftly I fled to immure myself in that little sanctuary, which I had been permitted to appropriate, in one of those rare nooks only afforded by such old Elizabethan houses, as that in which my relatives then abode.’<sup>11</sup>

This condition, so well depicted, did not last long. It was a cold gleam of sunshine in the last hour of a wintry day. Nor was it wholly beneficial to Kitto. He was becoming too much the lord of himself, for he seems to have been gratified in all his caprices that did not involve pecuniary outlay. The sympathy so naturally felt for him by his relations, inclined them to fondle and humour him. Nay, the child author and artist, was in danger of being admired as a prodigy. But a severe and curative probation was before him. About the end of the year 1818, his grandmother was obliged to leave Plymouth, in order to reside at Brixton. The darling grandchild could not accompany her, and he was left alone with his parents, and entirely dependent on them. Ah! then did he suffer. His father was unreformed: vice had turned his heart into a stone, and he was insensible alike to his own disgrace, the degradation of his wife, and the cries of his young ones for bread. It was certainly no merit of his that his famishing children preserved their honesty, and did not stray into those courses toward which temptation is ever pointing so many in quest of food and raiment. For months was the boy a pitiable spectacle—pinched with hunger, shivering in rags, and crawling about with exposed and bleeding feet. A picture of more abject wretchedness could not be found, than this deaf and puny starveling. Every prospect was closed upon him, and to screen him from ‘cold, and hunger, and nakedness,’ he was, ‘on the 15th of November 1819, admitted into the Plymouth Workhouse.’<sup>12</sup> The sorrow and want of his home had been long notorious; the neighbourhood was scandalized at his daily and hopeless privations; charity was roused at length to interfere without regard to his wishes and feelings; and, therefore, as the last and unwelcome resource, he was seized and sent to the common receptacle of aged and juvenile pauperism and wretchedness.

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## FOOTNOTES

1 It may be added, that Kitto's uncle, who had got a superior education, fell a victim to intemperance, as well as his father. The uncle had some local fame as an engineer, having 'constructed the Upper Road across the Laira marshes from Plymouth towards Exeter, and embanked a great portion of this road from the tide.'—*Lost Senses*, p. 7. Both brothers had come from their native parish of Gwennap, in Cornwall, to Plymouth, attracted by the high rate of wages. Mrs Picken, with her two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, lived in the same street with them, and the result was, that the two Kittos courted and married the two sisters about the same period. Kitto, in his *Workhouse Journal*, fills some pages with the sad story of his uncle, who was at length so reduced that he wrought on the Hoe as a pauper, and he concludes by saying, 'Drunkenness is the bane of our family, and the name of Kitto is synonymous with drunkard.'

2 The record of his abode with his grandmother is given at full length in a letter by Kitto, dated Baghdad, June 25, 1832—an interesting piece of autobiography, from which our knowledge of this portion of his life is derived, so that the source of the subsequent quotations needs not be again referred to.

3 Letter addressed to Sir Walter Scott, found among his papers.

4 Preface to his first publication.

5 *Ibid.*

6 *Workhouse Journal*.

7 'Lost Senses—Deafness.' By John Kitto, D.D., pp. 11, 12 .

8 The details are given by Kitto in two papers in the fourth volume of the *Penny Magazine*, pp. 218 and 227.

9 This Old Aubrey, the antiquary, says of Hobbes, 'He took great delight to go to the bookbinders' and stationers' shops, and lye gaping on mapps.'

10 Letter to George Harvey, Esq., January 19, 1827.

11 'Lost Senses—Deafness,' pp. 76, 78.

12 This workhouse, originally founded in 1630, was called the 'Hospital of the Poor's Portion.' A new one has now been erected in a different part of the town. The old building stills stands, however, in its comparative desolation, as when we saw it in the beginning of last year. It had been tenanted a short time before by about fifty Emancipadoes from Cuba—negroes who had purchased their freedom, and who were on their way to Lagos and Abcokuta. Our fiend Dr Tregelles and his lady, with others, were very attentive to them. Sent ices in Spanish were held with them every Lord's Day, as well as many meetings during the week. The old workhouse

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seemed alive again with its sable inmates, and the Christian efforts did not appear to be without fruit.